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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2980
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001371

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CPAS](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: POSSIBLE ISSUE INVOLVING NEW
TURKMEN TRAVEL PASSPORTS FOR DUAL CITIZENS

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: There are indications that the Turkmen government may have stopped issuing new Turkmen travel passports to citizens who hold dual citizenship. Most of those who applied for the new passport in July received it within a week to two weeks. Post knows of three individuals with dual Russian and Turkmen citizenship, however, who have heard nothing regarding their applications in several months, and there are rumors that it has happened to others. The reasons for the delay are unclear, although it is possible that the Immigration Service is not issuing travel passports to dual citizens because it has not received any guidance on handling their applications yet. A Russian passport carries privileges that facilitate travel abroad, but Turkmen citizens still must have their Turkmen passports examined and stamped before they can depart. With no information coming out of government agencies on the issue, however, many are becoming concerned. Post is looking into the implications of this possible policy change for the few AmCits who hold both U.S. and Turkmen nationality. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Some Ashgabat residents have become convinced that Turkmenistan's Immigration Service is withholding issuance of the new foreign travel passport to Turkmen citizens who hold Russian passports. The Immigration Service began accepting applications for the new, separate foreign travel passport in July, and a number of citizens who applied in July or August reported that they received their new passports in as little as one or two weeks. The application has a box that must be checked to indicate whether the applicant has dual citizenship, and rumors are circulating that those who check yes are not receiving new travel passports. Meanwhile, the MFA is still issuing the old Turkmen passport that will be valid for foreign travel until 2013, and those holding Russian passports can still renew them every five years.

13. (C) Post is aware of at least three individuals with dual Russian-Turkmen citizenship, one of whom is an embassy employee, who have received no feedback regarding their applications in several months. In one case, two sisters applied for the passport at the same time, in July. The first sister, who held only the internal Turkmen passport, received her new foreign travel passport after one week. The

second sister, who has dual Russian citizenship and a Russian passport, has still not heard from the Immigration Service regarding the status of her application. Russian passports have valuable privileges. A Russian passport holder, for example, enjoys visa-free travel to most former Soviet republics. Turkmen citizens who do not have a Russian passport must pay 120 US dollars to apply for a Russian visa, and wait weeks to receive it. It is also easier for Russian passport holders to get visas to travel to other foreign countries than those with a Turkmen passport.

¶4. (C) However, a Turkmen citizen seeking to travel abroad on his Russian passport is still required to show his Turkmen passport and have it stamped, before clearing passport control. If this is not done, the traveler cannot clear passport control because his Russian passport does not contain a Turkmen visa or a foreign citizen registration card. Both passports have to be shown in order to depart.

¶5. (C) It is unclear why the Immigration Service would want to withhold the travel passport from citizens holding Russian passports. The newly adopted Constitution states that Turkmenistan does not recognize the foreign citizenship of a Turkmen citizen. This language was present in previous iterations as well, but was not enforced. It is possible that the Immigration Service is not issuing travel passports to dual citizens because it has not received any guidance on handling their applications yet. This would not be surprising, given that until July, only the MFA issued Turkmen passports. The MFA is still issuing the original

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passport, which will become an internal passport after 2013, but the Immigration Service has responsibility for issuance of the new foreign travel passport.

¶6. (U) Post to date has not heard from dual Turkmen/US citizens who have been affected by the new passport rules. It is likely that if forced to choose, most dual nationals would abandon their Turkmen citizenship, and be subject to the regular Turkmen entry requirements. Any developments that affect AmCits will be reported septel.

BACKGROUND ON DUAL CITIZENSHIP

¶7. (C) The issue of dual citizenship in Turkmenistan is a complex one: In 1993, just a year after Turkmenistan adopted its first national constitution, the presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia signed an Agreement on Dual Citizenship. Turkmen citizens who were partially or fully ethnic Russian rushed to acquire Russian passports, which allowed them visa-free travel across the former Soviet Union, and an easier application process for visas to Europe and the United States. The Russian Embassy began issuing passports to Turkmen citizens in 1993. As of 2003, Russian government sources stated that some 95,000 Turkmen citizens held Russian passports.

¶8. (C) In the spring of 2003, however, former President Niyazov, angered that dual citizens had played a role in the 2002 attack on his motorcade, sought to terminate the agreement. After a series of discussions failed to resolve the issue, Turkmenistan unilaterally withdrew from the 1993 agreement, and Niyazov issued a decree forcing dual citizens to give up one of their passports within three months. The decree caused panic among dual citizens. In 2004, after months of tense negotiations, the Russian and Turkmen governments came to an agreement that appeared to have settled concerns on both sides. The Russians said they would stop granting citizenship to Turkmen citizens, and Turkmenistan did not implement the decree forcing its citizens to choose a single citizenship. Post's consular section recently saw a dual citizen Russian passport with an issuance year of 2007, so it appears that the Russian embassy has continued to grant passports here.

19. (C) COMMENT: Post is keeping its ears open for additional information regarding what formal policy position the government will take on the issue of dual citizenship/passports. As with other issues, the absence of official information is causing concern among those affected.

END COMMENT.

CURRAN